UDC 551.326.6.022:551.507.362.2:778.35(99)(084.1)

PICTURE OF THE MONTH

Observation of Icebergs From Satellites

ALBERTO PORRAS

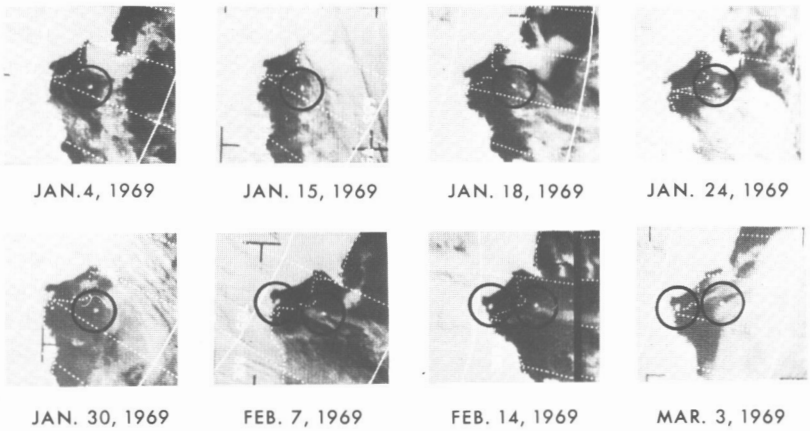
Project FAMOS, Fleet Weather Facility, U.S. Navy, Washington, D.C.

The satellite pictures within figure 1 show icebergs that have been discharged from the Lambert Glacier into Prydz Bay, East Antarctica. The icebergs shown in the centers of the circles are roughly 15 mi in diameter, as derived from their size in relation to the distance between latitude circles on the picture grids. During the short Antarctic summer, calving of the glaciers around Antarctica releases great numbers of huge icebergs that, driven by winds and currents, drift slowly northward and become a serious hindrance to navigation.

These pictures were selected to represent a period of 2 mo during which first one, then two large bergs could be seen almost daily in Prydz Bay. The seventh picture shows the second berg shortly after it became detached from the parent glacier.

Icebergs can be identified in satellite pictures by looking for small bright blobs with sharp edges. They can be positively differentiated from clouds by the fact that they move so slowly that they appear in nearly the same location day after day. By comparison, individual cloud elements in this part of the world typically move several hundred miles over a 24-hr period.

These pictures clearly show the feasibility of using weather satellite pictures to locate large masses of ice and to follow their progress from day to day as protection to navigation.



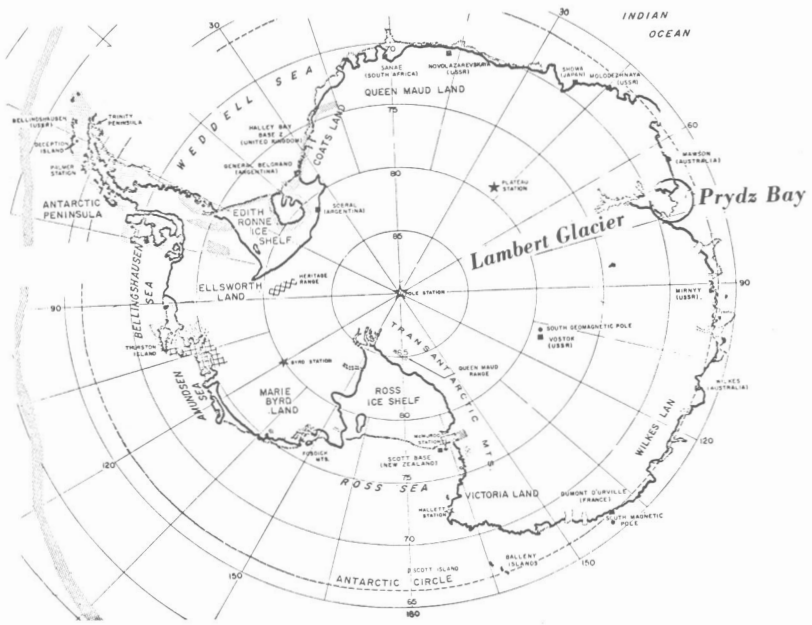


FIGURE 1.—Icebergs on satellite photographs of Prydz Bay, East Antarctica.